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Exploration and Discovery.

THE DECIPHERMENT OF THE ASSYRIO-BABYLONIAN INSCRIPTIONS.

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II.

Passing over Löwenstern, de Saulcy, Longperier and others we come to the Irishman, Edward Hincks (died December 3, 1866, at Killeleagh, County Down, Ireland). In 1849 Hincks read a paper before the Irish Academy on the Khorsabad inscriptions in which he dealt chiefly with the ideograms of the Assyrio-Babylonian, and with the chronology of the Assyrians. In 1856 an appendix to the foregoing containing "Addenda and Corrigenda" was printed. In all probability this appendix was printed in 1850, but the complete volume of the Transactions of the Academy did not appear until 1855. The most important discovery in this Appendix is that the so-called Homophones (*i. e.* signs with the same value) for the single consonants were in reality different signs, some of which had a vowel before them and others a vowel after them; or, to be more explicit, in the case of the seven accepted signs for the consonant *b*, the values *ab*, *ib*, *ub*, *ba*, *bi*, *be*, and *bu* were to be sharply distinguished from each other. This was a great gain for the decipherment of the Assyrian. The list of signs was, on account of this discovery, quite different from the one proposed by de Saulcy and by Hincks himself in his earlier writings. The phonetic complement was discovered independently by both Hincks and Rawlinson. This so-called complement is a sign attached to an ideogram to indicate the reading of the ideogram, *e. g.* IS. KU = both *kakku* and *tukultu*. When the ideogram is to be read *tukultu*, we have, in almost every case, the phonetic complement, *tu*, *ti* or *ta* added to the IS. KU. to indicate this reading. The compound syllabic values were first noted by Hincks, viz: signs having values consisting of a consonant + a vowel + a consonant, as *dan* (= *da-an*), *bul* (= *bu-ul*), etc. The so-called "allophones" or "polyphones," *i. e.* characters that can be read in two or more different ways, *e. g.* *dan*, *kal*, *lab*, *rib*, all values of one sign, were first observed by Rawlinson. Cf. also *riu-u-kit*, to be read *u-sam-kit*.

With Hommel, the history of the investigations from 1851 on can be divided

into two periods, with Hincks and Oppert as the leaders of the first. During this period, all that had been done before was arranged philologically and new facts gathered from new inscriptions were added to those already known. In 1868, '70 and '72 appeared the first three volumes of Edwin Norris' *Assyrian Dictionary*. During this time volumes I–IV of *The Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia* were published by Rawlinson, Norris and George Smith.

Schrader, the father of Assyriology in Germany, may be regarded as the connecting link between these two periods, belonging neither to the first nor to the second. His great service to the science has been from the standpoint of history and not of philology.

The second period begins with Friedrich Delitzsch and continues to the present time. The characteristic feature of this period is the close and strictly philological work done by Delitzsch and his school. When Delitzsch commenced the study of Assyrian, "Assyriology was in a state of slavish dependence on Arabic lexicography." He soon became convinced that Arabic was not so important to the study of Assyrian as the North Semitic languages, the Hebrew and the Aramaic dialects. He was the first to make any real attempt to explain the vocabulary of the Assyrians by means of the usage of words in the Assyrian texts. In other words, instead of slavishly following the lexicons of the Arabic, Hebrew, etc., and giving Arabic meanings to roots in Assyrian containing the same radicals, he studied the language from its own literature, calling the cognates to his assistance only when it was necessary. All the historical inscriptions have been retranslated and explained philologically. Much good work has been done in the mythical texts (Haupt, Jensen); the religious literature (Zimmern, Sayce, etc.); the contract tablets (Strassmaier, Talqvist, Peiser and others); syllabaries (Delitzsch); astronomical tablets (Oppert, Sayce, Epping and Strassmaier); letters (Smith, Delitzsch and others). There still remains a great deal to be done.

"The historical inscriptions of Assyria and Babylonia have been, for the most part, carefully studied and translated. The more important texts hitherto published have been collated and fresh translations made by competent scholars during the last decade. No one can hope to add much to Semitic science historically, or linguistically, by continuing to work over the old material. There are not a few passages in these inscriptions in which there is still uncertainty, and others are wholly obscure. The obscurities are mainly etymological and lexical, and the aid necessary to their elucidation can be found only in new historical texts yet to be discovered, or, to a limited extent, in other branches of its copious literature, still imperfectly examined or wholly unknown. Assyriology in the future, more than in the past, must depend upon itself for its interpretation without, however, disdaining valuable suggestions yet to be received from Hebrew and Aramaic, Arabic and Syriac, and even from some of the more remotely connected branches of this widespread family of languages. Assyrian possesses a vast deal of material for its exposition in the thousands of unpublished texts in the British Museum and in the

other collections in Europe and the United States. But the past lines of advance are not the future lines of progress. The time for the publication of "Miscellaneous Texts" is past. There is a call for students to devote themselves to special "series" dealing with particular subjects. Not even vocabularies and syllabaries can safely be taken at random and applied without discrimination to texts generally. Many of them were evidently intended for the explanation of special works. The meanings attached have application only within the bounds of the subject for which they were prepared. It is well known that even in modern languages words which are the same orthographically and genetically connote, by the special uses to which they have been applied, quite divergent and sometimes even antithetic ideas. This occurred much more frequently in ancient languages than in modern. Facility in the formation of special terms was not a characteristic of early languages. The main vocabulary was levied upon for the best it could offer to do duty in their stead, and these words were, so to speak, compelled to connote certain ideas in accordance with the character of the subject treated. This fact must not be lost sight of by Assyriologists, for, great as is the temptation to overlook it, the confusion consequent upon the oversight may be greater. This is not the place to discuss this subject. We call attention to it here in connection with the work under review. Not only must Assyriology depend more largely upon itself, but, further, each department of its literature must be studied exhaustively and, to a certain extent, independently. Astrological and astronomical works cannot be explained except in their own light. Mythological, ceremonial and religious texts derive little aid from contract tablets. Epistolary correspondence cannot be successfully made out by depending upon the historical vocabulary. Each class, if it is to be studied profoundly and scientifically, demands separate and exhaustive examination."¹

¹J. A. Craig, in his review of Harper's *Assyrian and Babylonian Letters belonging to the K Collection*. *Hebraica*, vol. vii., Nos. 3 and 4.